

G99/Q10



## Producer Research Support

### Improving Goat Production

South Qld Goat Meat Producers



#### The Project

Members of the South Queensland Goat Meat Producers group set out to develop a profitable and sustainable goat industry by improving the management of reproduction and knowledge of nutritional requirements.

#### Objectives

1. Increase average kidding percentage by 30% from 120% to 150%;
2. Produce a saleable carcass of 20kgDW at less than 12 months of age;
3. Minimise kid losses and maximise the kids weaned to 125% – 150%;
4. Increase the enterprise gross margin to \$13/dse; and
5. Determine stocking rates for different classes of country.

#### What was done

Group members were all primary producers who ran a goat enterprise that contributed significantly to their farming operations.

Properties were generally large (4,000 hectare) extensive grazing properties. There were two smaller mixed farming properties of about 800 ha involved in the project.

The group had a large geographical spread, which made it difficult to conduct regular meetings.

#### What happened?

Group spokesperson Tim Perrottet, Dirranbandi, Queensland said kidding percentages ranged markedly from property to property and year to year.

The group found that does need to be in good condition – especially in the last trimester of pregnancy.

Prior preparation is important. Potential problems at kidding can be offset by locking paddocks up to ensure quality feed for the doe. Producers should also be prepared to supplement their does through this stage.

Paddocks that have good cover and protection from the wind and elements should be selected to minimise losses of newborn kids. Predators are a big problem with losses as high as 30–40% of kids in some cases. All group members do some form of predator control but precision control is difficult on the more extensive properties in western Queensland. Most common control measures are baiting, trapping and shooting with an intensive campaign in the month leading up to and after kidding.

Seasonal conditions at mating and at kidding play a very large part in the kidding percentage. Plans and strategies are needed to counteract these circumstances. Seasonal and climatic conditions leading up to and at kidding had a large bearing on the management strategies that need to be used.

Members of the South Queensland Goat Meat Producers group have condensed knowledge gained during a Producer Research Support project into six top tips to achieve increased kidding and weaning percentages in goats.

#### Key Points

Top tips to increase kidding and weaning percentages in goats:

- Supplement bucks before mating;
- Condense mating to 6–8 weeks;
- Use smaller paddocks with cover for kidding;
- Destock kidding paddocks prior to kidding to ensure a good supply of quality feed;
- Be prepared to supplement does in the last trimester of pregnancy if there is limited paddock feed; and
- Conduct a concerted baiting program in the 6–8 weeks prior to and after kidding to reduce predation.

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## Producer Research Support

MLA Producer Research Support offers support funding of up to \$15,000 over three years for groups of producers keen to be active in on-farm research and demonstration trials.

These activities include:

- Producer Initiated Research and Development
- More Beef from Pastures demonstration trials
- Prime Time Wean More Lambs demonstration trials
- Sustainable and productive grazing grants.

Contact Stephen Feighan - MLA Project Manager, Producer Delivery and Adoption.  
Tel (02) 9463 9245 or  
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## MLA also recommends EDGenetwork

EDGenetwork offers practical field-based workshops to improve productivity and profitability for the long-term.

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The type and background of bucks used is important. If Boer bucks were bought from a grain feeding stud and introduced straight into an extensive grazing environment in very large paddocks in hot summer conditions, they did not perform very well at all. Bucks born into or conditioned to the environment produce significantly more kids.

Management of the does leading up to and at kidding is also important. Moving does to paddocks with better feed and more shelter is desirable but this was difficult to do on the larger, more extensive properties.

Overstocked paddocks result in lower levels of nutrition and, sometimes, worm infestation. The net result can be does aborting, fewer kids per doe and lower birth weights.

### Weaning Percentage

Weaning percentages also varied and in many cases were significantly lower than that assumed. The main reasons for this was put down to vermin – foxes, dingoes, wild pigs, eagles and eagle hawks. The management strategies to control vermin had the single greatest influence on the death rate between kidding and weaning.

A variety of strategies were employed with varying success, including baiting in the weeks leading up to and after kidding, trapping and shooting. Due to the size of some of the properties it was very difficult in some cases to cover all of the area involved.

### Controlled Mating

One strategy that was suggested by consultant Barrie Restall was to plan a controlled mating/kidding program that ensured does and bucks were in good body condition. This was achieved by separating the does and bucks leading up to mating and synchronising does to be cycling when bucks were introduced.

This would allow the manager to know exactly when the does were going to kid so they can ensure feed is available to the does leading up to birth and that does can be moved to a smaller paddock close to the homestead that has good cover and is easy to monitor. This would also allow a condensed, targeted vermin control program.

Mr Perrottet said this strategy, although very good in theory, did not work well in practice. The main reasons for this were a lack of suitable paddocks, time, expertise and dry seasonal conditions.

### Climatic Conditions

Mr Perrottet said in some cases there were severe cold snaps soon after kidding. These resulted in large kid losses. Some does abandon their kids in drought conditions.

### Gross Margin Analysis

The group decided that an analysis of the gross margin per Dry Stock Equivalent (DSE) would give a good indication of how the goat enterprise was actually performing.

The figures collated indicated that the average gross margin at the start of the Producer Research Support project was about \$7/dse. By the end of the project this had risen to \$8/dse – this equates to an increase of over 14%.

"When looking at the target gross margin, which included 150% kidding and 140% reaching sale weight, the gross was \$14/dse," Mr Perrottet said.



He said the factor that had the most impact on the gross margin was the number of sale animals as a percentage of the number of does. A 20% drop in kidding reduced the gross margin to \$11.80/head.

This emphasised the need to improve mating and kidding management practices. Mr Perrottet said there were a number of general issues that were also revealed as a result of the project, which included:

- stocking rates with the goats were initially higher than for sheep. This was attributed to the extra browse available from trees during the first one to two years;
- pastures improved markedly compared to when sheep were grazing the paddock. This was due to the goats' preference to browse, rather than graze; and
- if the higher stocking rate was maintained indefinitely, production levels – kidding percentage and liveweight of sale stock – eventually started to fall.

"The group is undertaking additional research to better understand goat eating habits and their effect on vegetation composition over time. The aim is to develop sustainable stocking rates for their properties. This will hopefully lead to long-term profitable goat enterprises," Mr Perrottet said.

Mr Perrottet said the biggest hurdle on the extensive properties involved was building the capital to upgrade fences and subdivide paddocks to a goat-proof standard.

**Table 1. Summary of actual and target kidding, losses, weaning percentages and gross margin figures**

Indicator	Current (1/07/99)	Target	Actual (30/06/01)
Kidding%	110%	150%	110%
Losses%	(25%)	(10%)	(10%)
Weaning%	75%	140%	90%
Gross Margin \$/DSE	\$7	\$13	\$8

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